B. Cultivation Equipment and Tillage

Of the implements observed in Malta, the traditional types of plough, hoe, sickle and harrow are of the same genera as those to be generally found in the Mediterranean region (Fig. 140).

Ploughs are of the *Aratrum* or *Ard* type, steel tipped wooden wedges, devoid of cutting edges and having very restricted powers of furrow making or inversion - *moldriel*. None of those observed had lateral 'ears' or 'wings' but apparently ards thus equipped are occasionally used. There are various sub-types with differing arrangements of beam, body and handle but no constant rational relationship between these sub-types and local environments could be observed. Prices range upwards of £4 10s. 0d. Iron or steel tips for the body cost about £1. One interesting modification of the plough is manufactured at Żurrieq. On top of the basic beam and body is fitted a movable double mouldboard of which either or both breasts can be brought into operation at any one time. Ridging and left and right furrow inversion are therefore made possible. For those areas where furrow inversion is practicable such a cheap, light multi-purpose implement would be very valuable, and the development of such improvements might well be encouraged by official approbation.

Hoes are manufactured in four main types. The heavy spade type, the *Łappuna*, is generally used for soil trenching in preparation for manuring. The effort involved tends to restrict its use. The small, single tined, wedge-shaped hoe, the *Mgħazqa* or *Lexxuma*, is a general purpose implement that is replaced under damp and cohesive soil conditions by a forked, two-tined variety, the *Kroxun*. A three-tined hoe is often used, together with the ard, for potato lifting. In general, each cultivator possesses a selection of different types of hoe, necessitated by the variety of manual operations he usually has to perform and made possible by the reasonable prices of the implements (prices range from about 16s. for the single-tine, to 18s. to £1 for the spade hoe).

The sickle in general use is a small, smooth-edged type costing about 12s. 6d. The small number of sickle types observed may result from the widespread practice of pulling rather than cutting green fodder. Traditional harrows are almost invariably of the Mediterranean and Asiatic type, harrows cum levellers and seed coverers. Those observed were triangular and stone weighted. When manufactured for the purpose they were usually constructed of ash and had removable tines. Without metal tines, the cost is about 50s.

These implements, of which illustrated examples are given (Fig.140), have already to some extent been displaced by imported newer types. Most farmers who possess fields which are at all accessible to tractors now periodically hire contractors to plough the land with mouldboard or disc ploughs and even, in some areas, with deep digger-ploughs. Where plots are small or the terrain difficult, then rotary cultivators are hired or purchased. These latter machines, in spite of their relatively high cost - usually over £200 in Malta - are amazingly popular and are more and more replacing the *ard* and the hoe. The reasons for, and implications of this popularity are examined below.

The spade proper is hardly ever used, and its absence is associated with the reasons for the survival of the *ard* plough. Small, light, flexible, metal harrows are to be found. Entirely imported, their only advantages are their flexibility on rough ground and ease of draught. They are, on the other hand, more easily damaged and more difficult to repair than their wooden prototypes. Other equipment includes a great range of fixed and movable adjuncts to farming, all but one class of which are constructed rurally from local materials. The exceptional group is that connected with irrigation and includes windpumps and small diesel engines. Threshing and winnowing, traditional style, needs no more than a rock or *lorbe* (beaten earth) floor and asses or horses for trampling, baskets constructed of local cane, and simple wooden winnowing forks. Of recent years, centralised threshing by contractors' machines has almost entirely displaced the older method in all but the more remote western regions. Canes, grown in slightly marshy conditions in wied floors, provide the raw material for wind breaks, covered forcing beds, crop supports, etc.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
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religious processions. The greatest concentration of ceremonies is around Easter. This cycle starts with the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows on the Friday before Palm Sunday. Virtually all the inhabitants escort the statue through the principal streets of the village. This is followed by the Palm Sunday procession around the church square.[1] On Maundy Thursday there is a long service during which the parish priest washes the feet of twelve village laymen. Immediately after this the church is draped completely in black damask, and a huge wooden rattle replaces the church bells as a sign of mourning. On Maundy Thursday and on Good Friday in the morning, family groups visit the church and, passing before the statues depicting scenes from the Passion, stop to pray before the elaborate Sepulchre constructed in one of the chapels. Members of each of the village associations and clubs visit the Sepulchre in groups. Many families make pilgrimages to the churches in the twelve other parishes which hold Good Friday processions. At each one they offer prayers before the Sepulchre and pause to examine the statues and funereal hangings of their rivals before going on. All morning visitors from outside stream into Kortin to see the church. Then, at about two in the afternoon, there is a three-hour sermon on the Passion. This is followed by the Good Friday procession.

Old Manwel, the procurator, directs the procession. This is his big day. During the preceding weeks, he and Anton and Pawlu, the two men who take charge of decorating the parish for special occasions, worked very hard getting ready the eight statues, assembling the ornate Sepulchre and collecting the £90 required to meet the expenses of the Holy Week. Since he became procurator twenty years ago, Manwel has collected almost £3,000 for new statues, costumes, banners and black damask for the church. The procession itself lasts about three hours. Some 420 men and youths from the village carry and escort the eight huge statues. Some of the men have carried the same statue for years. The ten who carry the statue of the Crucifixion have protected their right to do so by a notarized contract with the parish priest. In return they have spent almost £200 over the past ten years to

[1] Instead of palm fronds, olive branches are distributed to the faithful. It is generally believed that if these blessed branches are burned, their smoke is particularly effective against the harmful effects of the evil eye. Farmers pass burning leaves through their cattle sheds, and I have met professionals who do the same to their salons before cocktail parties.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

directed upwards, and having a mouth piece by which the skin is filled, and a cane flute or pipe which is played with both hands. This the country people play at this time of the year to represent the shepherds of Bethlehem. 796 534 [237]

The decking out of the *presepiu*, a crib or representation of the Nativity of the Holy Child at Bethlehem, by a group of dolls with pasteboard scenery, furnishes amusement to the Maltese, both old and young. 796 798

Several of the houses have a crib more or less artistically arranged, and the better the arrangements of the crib, the greater is the concourse of people who come to see it.

The custom of decking our churches and habitations with evergreens at Christmas has existed from the very establishment of Christianity and was 796 174 824

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

796 unquestionably derived from the like
174 practice of our Pagan ancestors.
824

"Trimming of Temples," says Polydore Virgil "with hangings, flowers, boughs, and garlands was taken from the heathen people, who decked their idols and houses with such array.

796 "Christmas," says Blount, "was
174 called the feast of lights in the Western
373 or Latin Church, from the many lights or candles that were lit at the feast, and this because Christ, the light of all lights, that true light, then came into the world. Hence the prevalent custom to have so many lights in our churches at Christmas midnight service.

796 The custom of eating pancakes or
174 fritters and honey cakes at Christmas
262 in Malta is supposed to owe its origin to the cakes baked in honour of *Janus*, who presided over the beginning of the New Year.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

MAY DAY

175 529 824 Historians mention that there was a time in Malta, during the Government of the Knights of St. John, when it was customary on the 1st of May to deck the Grand Master's palace balcony, and the doors of those who were invested with the Grand Cross, with branches [194] of trees. It appears that this sign of a holiday, which was introduced in Malta by the families from the island of Rhodes, was a remnant of the worship of the sun, formerly adored by the Rhodians.

171 529 824 Bourne cites Polydor Virgil, as telling us that among the Italians the youth of both sexes were accustomed to go into the fields in the Calends of May, and bring thence branches of trees, singing all the way as they came, and to place them on the doors of their

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

houses. This, he observes, is a relic of an ancient custom among the Heathens, who observed the last 4 days of April, and the 1st day of May in honour of the goddess *Flora* who was imagined to be the deity presiding over the fruits and flowers.

171 527 824

THE CUCCANJA

This is an entertainment which was formerly given by the Grand Master to the Maltese on Shrove Tuesday, the last day of the Carnival.

175 527

Long beams were fixed against the guard house opposite the palace, and between each of the beams, rope-ladders were fastened, the whole being covered over with branches of trees in leaf, to which were tied, from top to bottom, live animals, baskets full of eggs, hams, sausages, and all kinds of provisions.

527 526 175

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

or trumpets. Before the corpse was interred, a pillow filled with orange and laurel leaves (*) was placed under the head, and a carpet spread over the tomb, which was suffered to remain some days, to show that during that time it was forbidden to walk over it.

No fire was lighted for three days in the kitchen of the deceased, and either one of the relations or some most intimate friend sent a dinner to the inhabitants of the house, which they ate cross-legged on the floor.

Women on this occasion remained forty days in the house, but men went out on the seventh day, with their faces unshaven. (†)

(*) Orange trees were regarded by the Pagans as expiatory.

(†) Mourning among the ancients was expressed by very different signs; such as by rending of garments, wearing sack cloth, laying aside crowns &c. Thus Plutarch, in his life of Cato, relates, that from the time of his leaving the city with Pompey, he neither shaved his head, nor, as usual, wore his crown or garland.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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THE ROSE

When a women is about to give birth to a child she sends to one of her neighbours for the loan of a withered flower called the "Passion Flower" which is put at once into the water. As soon as the flower opens the woman is delivered of the child. 844 824

It is true that the rose opens after it has remained in the water for some time, although quite withered, but the fanaticism of some of our people is really excessive. A certain man relates that his wife was about to be confined and one of the neighbours brought her a passion flower, in the confusion, however, that prevailed at the moment, the withered flower was thrown into a drawer and they forgot all about it.

Shortly after the woman was delivered of three sons. The flower, however, was not to be seen.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

844
824 One of the inmates then remembered that it was left in a drawer. What was his astonishment, on opening that drawer, to find that on the stem of the withered flower were brought forth *three* branches covered with leaves!!!

THE EVIL EYE

754
755 Many of our people believe in the evil eye, and are of opinion that there are individuals who possess the power of inflicting injury by merely looking on those whom they wish to harm. It is, however, believed that any one who has been influenced by the evil eye of another, must procure a piece of cloth from the dress of the person by whom he has been fascinated, burn it, and expose himself to the smoke of it and

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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water, and according to the figure or shape it assumes when it solidifies so will be the fortune of the person who tries the experiment. If the lead becomes bright the maiden is to get a handsome young man for her husband, and lead a happy life with him; if it turns out black the husband will be ugly and the maiden may expect to lead a miserable existence. (*)

787
823

THE BATH

On Easter Sunday as soon as the *Gloria* is sung in the Churches, mothers dip their babies into a bath, in which

755
824

(*) A similar practice is kept up in Denmark, where young women melt lead on New Year's Eve, and after pouring it into water observed in the following morning what form it has assumed. If it resembles a pair of scissors, they will inevitably marry tailors; if a hammer their husbands will be smiths, and so on.

T. Dyer *Domestic Folklore.*

[171]

755 [824] are thrown some flowers which were used to decorate the sepulchre on Good Friday.

This the mothers do to cure their little ones from any fright they may have taken.

751 Some mothers dip their other children in succession in the same bath when the baby is taken out, and this they do in order that their children might not inherit the fright the one from the other.

THE FOOT BATH

757 Some people say that when you bathe your feet in hot water, while under the influence of fever, or head ache, a little salt should be added to the water to [755] strengthen it. But in order that the

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

THE ACACIA OR SPONGE-TREE

(Gazzïa)

824 Our ancestors had a strong aversion to introducing or bringing in the acacia or sponge-tree with the other flower-plants in the house.

[763] They believed that if the acacia were brought into the house the head thereof would die within twelve months.

THE NEWT

825 Our superstitiously inclined believe that when one kills a newt and leaves its tail contorting or wagging on the floor, that tail will be cursing the parents of its destroyer!

COAL-DUST AND SOOT

777 527 The throwing of coal-dust or soot instead of lime before a door on New year's day betokens gloom and bad luck.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

PARSLEY

824 763 When one plucks a stem of parsley by the roots and plants it again he may expect to lose one of his parents within the year.

THE HEN

825 763 When a hen crows it is at once destroyed as it foretells the death of some member of the family.

THE HAWKMOTH OR SPHINX

825 787 The appearance of a white hawkmoth betokens the coming home of some one who is abroad. The appearance of a black hawkmoth, however, is a harbinger of sad news.

COMETS

821 787 The appearance of a comet is a sign of an approaching evil.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

consists in cutting open a live rabbit and applying it with the still warm entrails on the stomach of the patient. 755 [825]

Piles—Carrying about a dried fig in one's pocket is considered a good specific for this complaint. [824]

Rheumatism—Amateurs of the healing art advised the sufferer to carry about a dried fish in his pocket as a charm for its cure. [825]

Sty—To prevent or cure this disorder it is customary for the patient to throw over his shoulders seven grains of barley in a well. [824]

The superstitiously inclined say that a sty forebodes the inheritance of some riches. [787]

Beside the omens and superstitions briefly described in the preceding pages 128

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178 795 so fervently Christian. The reason lies, perhaps, in their Catholicism. The Faith has a tolerant and not unfriendly eye for many of the Old Things. It is hard to think of St. Francis being unkind to a leprechaun.

The savants make much argument about Malta's folklore. The wish being often father to their able reasoning, they will prove from it that the Maltese are Phoenician or Arab or Italian with equal conviction. Like the Cornishman who will tell you that the Hobby Horse was invented to frighten away the French, the people themselves know little if anything of the reasons why certain tales are told, certain things done; but, from birth to grave, the Old Things—often recognisable, but always with their peculiar Maltese twist—make intermittent appearances in the lives of Zeppu[1] and Grez.[1]

Some of them even have so far won the good opinion of Mother Church as to be granted a place in her own ceremonies.

ON GETTING BORN

844 824 The Maltese baby—boy or girl—gets born with very little fuss, and is always welcome. In Gozo, or in what remains of country, some friend of the mother will assist the arrival of the little one, bringing into the house with her the withered bud of a certain rose. The flower is placed in water and slowly opens. At the moment of its fullest opening the child is born.

844 824 191 Here is clearly a very ancient magic. The association of the rose with Motherhood, with Life, and indeed with Godhead itself, is as old as time. In the Litany of Loretto, the Virgin Mother is invoked as "Rosa Mystica"—"Mystical Rose." Dante saw the innermost circle of the heavenly spheres as a rose. The Brahmins, the Persians, and the Jews all attached a high mystic symbolism to the rose. The simple peasant, 844 824 setting her rosebud in water, little knows what forgotten gods

[1] Popular personifications of the peasant and his wife.

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she honours and calls upon in her sister's hour of need. The tale is told of the birth-rose which was forgotten. Triplets were born. Later the rose was found, having grown on its withered stem three healthy branches bearing fresh, green leaves. Whatever deep significance attached originally to the birth-rose, the custom has a beauty of its own.

The next thought is for the little one's future. A gold ring or some other golden object is placed in the water in which he or she is washed, in order, they say, that riches will not be lacking. At one time, it may be, something of more value than the dross of riches was sought, for gold was the symbol of wisdom and a bright understanding long before it had value as currency.

It will be well if the baby is not red-headed, for the red-headed child will inevitably be known as "Son of the Wind," "Daughter of the alcove," or even more scurrilously, "Child of the priest." This readiness to doubt the paternity of poor little "Copper-knob" seems to indicate that, in spite of the blue or grey eyes of the peasants, the Maltese have always been an essentially brunette people. The slur may be no older than the occupation of the priestly knights, when celibacy must frequently have proved too much for the young "Aryans" of the Teutonic Langues. It may date back to the much earlier time of red-bearded Ullyses. It may, again, be nothing more than a rendering of "love-child"—for red has always been the colour of Love—sacred to Astoreth, Isis, and Venus.

Yet another of the Old Things has a hand in birth. Even to-day it is accounted by some a serious matter for a child to be born on Christmas Eve. Such a child is in danger of becoming a *Gaugau*—one whose spirit will leave its body every Christmas Eve—"They then go out and wander all over the island frightening people with their groanings. After thus performing these ghostly pranks for some hours,

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Maltese	*English*
"Red sky at evening, harness your mules. Red sky at morning, herd your beasts."	"Red sky at night, Shepherd's delight. Red sky in the morning Shepherd's warning."
"Ill weather comes, ahead or astern, when the cat sneezes."	"The cat washes herself before stormy weather."

821 171 539 [825]

Often it appears that sheer nonsense is mixed with sound common sense. Typical of the mixed "sense" and "nonsense" is the following: 245 824 242

"The first autumnal produce of the wild fig is called by the Maltese *Barru*. A second crop which takes place in winter is supposed to be due to the outcome of the first produce. This is called *Carru*, and is supposed to bring forth the third outcrop which appears in spring time and is recognized as the *dukkar* or real fertilizer of the fig. This fruit is cut and hung up in pairs on the bough of the fig tree.

"The male fruit (*dukkar*) is usually full of a colony of minute winged insects by the produce of which, the Maltese husbandman identifies the real fertilizing fruit. [825]

"The pomegranate is supposed to be fertilized by the flowers of the wild parsnip, and for this purpose bunches of these flowers are thrown over the pomegranate tree when in flower. *Dakra*, probably from *dakar* = to fertilize, is the name given to the wild parsnip by the Maltese husbandman.

"The male flowers of the wild carob-tree (*baghal*) are thrown over the branches of the female plant to favour impregnation.

Small pieces of coarse stone are still hung up in the jujube-tree with a view to securing a good produce. 241 823

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at the wrong season and so set right his error. The blessing is accompanied by the burning of leaves of the wild olive which have been blessed in Holy Week. Blessing, accompanied by sacred "fumigation," is very widely used—by fishermen to ensure a good catch, by newly married folk to ensure a happy house. 771 782 [226] [585]

GETTING MARRIED

Zeppu and Grez will think long and seriously before they get married. In an island where poverty is the rule rather than the exception, and there is no "dole," there can be no haphazard mating. Zeppu will wait until he has a sufficient competence and Grez will contribute her share of the common resources in the form of a "dot" which she, herself, has earned and saved. Until very recently all marriages were arranged by a professional "go-between"—an old woman wise in the ways of the world and in suitable matings. Even now there is little choice left to the girl. 584 [735]

In this matter of marriage, so hedged about with Christian law and custom, the Old Things still command a place. Their hands are perhaps more apparent than in the marriage customs of all other countries—themselves pagan enough in origin. 584 824

In the story which has been quoted the month of February is praised, amongst other reasons, because it is then that the "small-leaved basil" is tended and watered. The reference might be rendered "In the Spring a young man's fancy . . ." for the sweet basil is the sign and symbol that a marriageable girl awaits a suitor.

The small bush, either of basil or of the Madonna rose, is carefully tended and placed on the sill of an upper window. A well-grown plant is an indication that the maiden will make a good wife and mother. [787]

A suitor, seeing the "marriage bush" at an upper window,

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584 will walk up and down the village street wearing a red carna-
824 tion behind his right ear and a red handkerchief thrown over his left shoulder. The shy maiden will be peeping from behind the latticed window, probably accompanied by one or two giggling, curious younger sisters.

The symbolic bush has about it something of the atmosphere of the Song of Solomon:

> My beloved is unto me as a
> cluster of camphire in the vineyards of En-Gedi . . .
>
> I am the Rose of Sharon and
> the lily of the valleys. . . .
>
> A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse . . .
>
> Awake, O North Wind; and come, thou south;
> blow upon my garden that the spices
> thereof may flow out.
> Let my beloved come into his garden,
> and eat his pleasant fruits.

[822] The red carnation and the red handkerchief, badges of the
[171] lover, are of that colour which is sacred to Venus. The wearing of the flower has its parallel amongst the Polynesians, to whom a red flower behind the right ear means "I am looking for a sweetheart."

584 Official "courting" will not begin until the "go-between" and the parents have arranged matters to everybody's satisfaction.

585 After the religious ceremony the young folk separate,
801 returning to their homes for a period of eight days before
171 setting up house. The reason for the choice of the number "eight" may not be without significance; for eight, it is said, was one of the signs of the goddess Astoreth, while the ancient Egyptians had a company of eight gods who were the Fathers and Mothers of the World. The double form of the figure "8"

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
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will only be necessary for a "wise woman" or witch to spit on the hair while uttering a curse to bring misfortune upon the head which nourished it. 771 788 [754]

Grez will be careful not to laugh too heartily on a Friday—when the memory of the Crucifixion should make all sad. She will make the Sign of the Cross on leaving her house, on entering any vehicle or boat for no matter how short a journey, on cutting a piece of new cloth, before her baby's mouth when it yawns—so that evil spirits may not enter. On meeting a deformed or maimed person she will sign her corresponding limb or part of her body with the Cross. [826]

When she brings flowers into her house she will be as careful to exclude the acacia as any West-country woman to avoid "may" or whitethorn, for the spiky Maltese acacia is the "thorn" of Palestine wherewith the Saviour was crowned. 771 [824]

These are but a few of the small ways in which the peasant woman pays a somewhat mixed homage to the Old Things as well as to the tenets of her Faith. In her favour it may be said that her "superstitions" are more logical than those of such folk who habitually "touch wood" or object to a third cigarette from one match.

THE FESTAS

The Festa, primarily a religious festival and a Holy Day of Obligation, provides the only relaxation for a hardworking and frugal people. Such simple pleasures as a meal of unaccustomed meat, a little wine, processions, and fireworks give full rein to the most lovable, childlike side of the national character. The importance attaching to these periodical holidays is well illustrated by an old rhyme: 796 [585] [675]

9: Luke G-5 (ca. 1920-ca. 1960) 1960
EZ6 Malta EZ6

although the Maltese form was probably dictated by the need to cover the head when entering a church. Its one drawback is that it takes up a lot of space, more space, unfortunately, than is available in the motor-bus, modern Malta's form of land transport. Let it be hoped that it will survive these disabilities, for it is not only unique but also an asset if those of the younger generation who have abandoned it in favour of the banal dress of everywhere else would only realize the fact, enhancing beauty while discreetly veiling any imperfections. These young ladies should ponder the words of Monsieur André Maurois in his little sketch of Malta:

> When its wearer moves, the *faldetta* is filled with air, and the Maltese girls, tripping in twos and threes along the streets, look like flotillas of graceful barques with black sails, blown along their course by the wind of destiny.

Oddly enough another French visitor and Academician anticipated by just a century, and in almost the same terms, Monsieur Maurois's charming flight, or perhaps echo, of fancy. Monsieur de Lamartine, visiting Malta with his English wife in 1832, describes the *ghonnella* as

> a half-cloak of black silk . . . of a light texture caught by a breeze, suggesting the sail of a skiff whose capricious folds alternately conceal and reveal the mysterious figure of the wearer, which seems able to escape at will from its embrace.

In the Malta of an earlier age, when the lives of Maltese women and girls were closely circumscribed, the *ghonnella* was not the only aid to their seclusion. Those who wander about the country districts will notice here and there that the older farmhouses have no windows giving on to the street; the Maltese countrywoman, like her Spanish sister, had to turn her face inward, not outward. But what the houses had, and some still retain, were stone brackets on the outer wall, made to hold the pots of sweet basil which showed that

9: Luke G-5 (ca. 1920-ca. 1960) 1960
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562 342 584 824 291

a marriageable daughter lived within. One pot of basil to each marriageable girl. So the potential swain could tell at a glance whereabouts to loiter for a discreet preview and what address, should he be interested, to give to the marriage-broker.

[PP 31–55 of Text not processed. Plates facing pp. 40, 41, 48 and 49 have been processed].